

U.S. Department of Labor Program Highlights



Fact Sheet No. OSHA 89-10

VOLUNTARY PROTECTION PROGRAMS

Employer-Initiated Programs To Strengthen Workplace Safety and Health

Do you have an effective safety and health program? Is your injury and/or illness rate lower than the average for your industry? Do managers and employees work together to prevent accidents and eliminate hazards? Would you like to develop a more cooperative relationship with OSHA?

If so, your company maybe a candidate for one of OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs--Star, Merit or the Demonstration Program. Designed to augment OSHA's enforcement efforts, these programs encourage and recognize excellence in occupational safety and health. Only those companies which demonstrate commitment to workplace safety and health beyond the requirements of the OSHA standards--especially at senior management levels--are eligible. Participation exempts a worksite from OSHA's programmed inspections.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

An effective, ongoing safety and health program. A strong safety and health program exemplifies commitment to the prevention of occupational illness and injury beyond satisfying the requirements of OSHA standards. It is the central element which qualifies a company for participation in the Voluntary Protection Programs. Companies participating in Merit and Star are expected to have comprehensive programs including elements such as employee participation and annual comprehensive self-evaluation. OSHA assesses the effectiveness of the program through a number of measures including on-site review.

Cooperation. A cooperative atmosphere is essential to make voluntary protection work. Construction companies are required to use a labor-management approach which includes joint labor-management safety and health committees. General industry sites may use some other form of employee participation. Companies must demonstrate that the collective bargaining agent(s) representing their employees, if any, has (have) no objection to the company's participation. It is important under all Voluntary Protection Programs that both employers and employees recognize that they retain their rights and responsibilities under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Good performance. Although performance levels required vary with the individual Voluntary Protection Program, the company must demonstrate that its efforts are working to minimize injury and illness in the workplace. Two indicators are the Bureau of Labor Statistics' injury incidence and lost workday injury rates. Also, the company must have demonstrated good faith in any previous dealings with OSHA.

STAR

Open to any industry, Star is targeted for a company with comprehensive, successful safety and health programs. Companies that are in the forefront of employee protection as indicated by three-year average incidence and lost workday case rates at or below the national average for their industry may participate. They must also meet requirements for

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extensive management systems. Because of the changing nature of the worksite, construction firms must maintain strong employee participation in their programs. Star participants are evaluated every three years, although their incident rates are reviewed annually.

MERIT

Merit is an effective stepping stone to Star. Merit sites may have more general management systems but must set goals for meeting Star requirements. While there are less stringent rate requirements for Merit, applicants must agree to specific goals for reducing rates to below the average for their industry. Merit participants are evaluated onsite annually.

DEMONSTRATION

The Demonstration program provides a basis for promising alternative safety and health program approaches that are not currently available under the VPP as well as to allow for special industry operations such as logging, maritime, etc. Alternative approaches that are successful will be considered for inclusion in the Star program.

OSHA RESPONSIBILITIES

Application review. Each applicant undergoes a review of its safety and health programs including

an onsite examination of its records and logs, a review of its inspection history, if any, and an assessment of site conditions. OSHA also conducts interviews of management and employees. The onsite portion of the review requires about three days.

Evaluation. Annual evaluations for Merit and Demonstration participation and three-year evaluations for Star participants compare injury and/or illness rates to industry rates, determine the satisfaction of participants and assure that the companies continue to meet the requirements. In addition, at Merit sites, OSHA measures progress toward Star requirements.

Contact person. For each participant, OSHA provides a contact person to provide assistance.

Inspections. OSHA retains responsibility for inspections in response to formal, valid employee complaints, significant chemical leaks and spills, and workplace fatalities and catastrophes.

For applications or further information, write OSHA Voluntary Protection Programs, Room N3700, Frances Perkins DOL Bldg., 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20210; telephone (202) 523-7266.

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